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Inside Job. First-person Documentary in Trauma Cinema: Balkan Champion (2006)

Contemporary media culture is enthusiastically concerned with traumas. News programmes summarize people's sufferings from war, famine and other catastrophes in short reports, sensational talk shows highlight the plight of people devastated by sexual abuse or terminal illness. Victims become heroes or stars in these talk shows for fifteen minutes, and they appear to like talking about their old and new wounds, which seemingly relieves their pain. Cultural and social theory distinguishes two essentially different types of trauma. The first one is personal trauma, which refers to the psychological and/or physical abuses committed against people in their personal and family lives. The second one is collective or historical trauma, which, as Allen Meek writes:

refers to events recognized as traumatic for specific groups of people. These often become signifiers of collective identity – for example: war, revolution, conquest, colonization, genocide, slavery and natural disaster [...] Any person or persons may identify with victims of an historical trauma without experiencing anything directly traumatic themselves. Historical trauma can also be understood as a form of identity crisis involving unresolved ethical, philosophical or political issues.[1]

Theoreticians talk about trauma culture concerning the general trend of perceiving the past as a series of repressed abuses. Trauma has taken a central position in understanding the past, owing to the postmodernization of culture. Andreas Huyssen creates a link between contemporary trauma culture and the “crisis of temporality” in the postmodern age. He asserts that the emphasis on memory and trauma is a response to our weakened sense of time due to technological progress.[2] Edward R. O'Neill, following the theoreticians of postmodernity, juxtaposes the relationship to time and history in modernity and postmodernity. While the man of modernity could understand himself in a historical progress and was aware of time, the man of postmodernity has “a mournful attitude towards history, since the past becomes fraught – by definition – with errors.”[3]

[1] A. Meek, *Trauma and Media*, London 2010, p. 32.

[2] A. Huyssen, “Trauma and Memory: A New Imaginary of Temporality”, in: *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time*, eds. J. Bennett, R. Kennedy, New York 2003, pp. 16–29.

[3] E.R. O'Neill, “Traumatic Postmodern Histories: ‘Velvet Goldmine’s Phantasmatic Testimonies’”, *Camera Obscura* 57, vol. 19, no. 3, p. 157.

Personal and historical traumas raise the question of their representation due to their very nature. Cultural theory sets up a dichotomy concerning the mode of trauma representation in contemporary media culture. Popular culture is said to (falsely) account for traumas in popular (often melodramatic) narratives, while audio-visual testimonies from the survivors and witnesses talk to the viewer personally and singularly. Allan Meek makes a clear distinction between authentic traumatic experience and the – often melodramatic – narrative and imagery in dominant media culture.[4] O'Neill believes that by emphasizing trauma and testimony, postmodern cinema can convey historical experience to the viewer. He distinguishes two strategies within postmodern cinema for presenting the past: historicist revisionism and the phantasmatic transcendental mode. "In historicist revisionism, the past is depicted through the visual styles associated with it"[5] (nostalgic, retro mode), while the films of the latter strategies "testify to catastrophes rather than simply representing them." [6] O'Neill argues that testimony is the adequate way of presenting the traumatic experiences for the viewer, because universalising the experience by means of generally established representational and narrative patterns can be avoided if the filmmaker gives voice to the sufferer or the witness of the event. He contends that

these very crises and catastrophes are themselves a part of a tectonic shift in which the singularity of individual experience and utterance no longer dissolves itself into the uniformity of a universalizable form of statements that are truly indifferent of their speakers.[7]

The suffering victims of traumatic events can regain their dignity by giving testimony, and the viewer or listener can share the burden of the memories with the witness by the very act of listening. As Dori Laub writes, "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event." [8]

The trauma debate was launched mainly by Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), which exerted an overwhelming influence on public thinking on recollection of the forgotten or rather suppressed past. *Shoah* also launched a trend in trauma documentaries by compelling the participants of the Holocaust (the survivors, the perpetrators and the witnesses) to reveal painful and horrible events which they had repressed for many decades. Since the release of *Shoah*, many documentaries have represented the aftermath of traumatic events and elicited recollection and confession from the victims about the near and distant past. In the present paper, I examine the way in which documentary represents personal and historical trauma. I focus on the first-person documentary, in which the filmmaker also lived the traumatic collec-

[4] A. Meek, op. cit., p. 26.

[5] E.R. O'Neill, op. cit., p. 159.

[6] Ibidem, p. 162.

[7] Ibidem, p. 163.

[8] D. Laub, S. Felman, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, New York 1992, p. 59.

tive experiment and faces the consequences of the past events. In my case study, I raise the question how the testimonies of the filmmaker's acquaintances, friends, and family members can attribute to the experience of the viewer in contrast with a trauma documentary created by an "outsider" director, and in which sense this type of documentary makes the filmmaker's position and responsibility unique.

The responsibility of the documentary filmmakers lies in the creation of dialogues between the past and present, the witness and the listener. Approaching the challenge facing the documentary filmmakers from the aspect of recalling traumatic events, a dual problem can be identified. First, the documentary must expose and reconstruct the events of a suppressed past, and second, it must convey the personal experience of the subjects and their feelings towards the traumatic event. The filmmakers need not only empathy to solve this dual problem, but they must choose an adequate position for themselves in the filmmaking process. No general rule can be set, as the very nature of traumatic events, the personality of the interviewed people, the filmmaker's relationship to the trauma, and her interviewees determine the ideal position. Examining the filmmaker's presence and attitude towards their subjects in (historical and personal) trauma documentaries, various stances can be found, ranging from the apparent neutrality and detached position to the explicitly personal participation and involvement in the projected world of the film. Claude Lanzmann, for example, takes a neutral position of asking particular questions on the horrible events of the Holocaust dryly without any emotional involvement. Thet Sambath also imitated a neutral position in order to worm his way into the confidence of the perpetrators, that is, the executioners and the ex-leader of Pol Pot regime in Cambodia (Nuon Chea), although his own family was killed in the era of the Khmer Rouge dictatorship, so his personal aim in making this documentary is to give justice to the victims and to confront the murderers with their consciousness (Thet Sambath – Rob Lemkin: *Enemies of the People*, 2009). Andrew Jarecki takes a neutral position in *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003); although he is, in fact, not present in the film at all, he relies heavily on a first-person home video made by the oldest brother in the traumatised family of an imprisoned paedophile father. Jonathan Caouette takes an extremely subjective position when he makes a first-person performative documentary about his traumatised childhood and adolescent years, composed of his own home videos (*Tarnation*, 2003).

I have chosen the Hungarian documentary *Balkan Champion* (Réka Kincses, 2006) to analyse the modes of revealing personal and collective traumas. I will argue that *Balkan Champion* reveals the emotional or inner truth of the experience of people who suffered personal trauma and were participants of a historical trauma, by employing the techniques of first-person interactive documentaries. Like most contemporary documentaries, *Balkan Champion* combines different

documentary filmmaking methods. First, the *cinéma vérité* style is utilized by observing the main characters in situations and conducting interviews with them. Second, the filmmaker employs first-person voice-over narration, and the narrative of a private investigator in the style of Nick Broomfield. Third, the filmmaker follows the methods of first-person documentaries by entering into the projected world of the documentary, provoking situations, confronting family members with one another. Réka Kincses elicits emotionally loaded speeches and behaviours by direct interaction with the characters. I contend that the filmmaker's personal participation in the filmed life of her own family provided her with an adequate position for revealing the ideological, behaviour and emotional patterns repeated as a consequence of personal and historical traumas. By violating the rule of the neutral or observer position, she caused suppressed family conflicts to erupt, and exposed the unspoken prejudices against other ethnic groups.

Réka Kincses represents herself in the documentary as a filmmaker living abroad, who feels estranged from her own childhood identity, that is, a proud, patriotic Hungarian. The story-line follows her homecoming, whose aim is to understand the personality of her father, the common past of her family, and her own identity. The author stands both inside and outside the Hungarian community of Transylvania and her family, which gives her a unique position to understand the personal aspects of the events. She plays the role of a family member, filmmaker and mediator who tries to foster mutual understanding between Hungarians and Romanians, Hungarians and Hungarians, and among family members. The author, as the first-person narrator of the documentary, invites the viewer into its projected world by investigating the failures of her father, Előd Kincses's. She attempts to understand the contradiction between her father's outstanding intellectual abilities, moral superiority, infallibility, and his repeated defeats by his political rivals. This type of first-person documentary always raises the question of why the filmmaker's personal or family businesses would be interesting for the audience, but in *Balkan Champion* more general problems are gradually related to the personal level of the inquiry, which helps the audience feel involved in the family affair.

The filmmaker traces back her father's present failures to his tragic defeat as the political leader of ethnic Hungarians in 1990. In December 1989, Előd Kincses was elected to the deputy chairman of the Maros county section of the *National Salvation Front* (FSN) which took over power, and steered the direction of the country immediately after the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu's communist regime. Réka Kincses shows the ethnic conflicts between Hungarians and Romanians in her film in order to make the viewer understand her father's public role and the cause of his failure. The political defeat after the turbulent days of the *Black March* in 1990 had serious consequences for the family's life. The father had to flee the country, leaving his wife and two daughters

behind. Attempting to make an elaborate portrait, the filmmaker exposes the hidden conflicts between the spouses and between the father and his daughters, which are rooted in his emigration and leaving the family. The list of conflicts does not end at family life, but includes political conflict in the Hungarian community, as well. A prominent ethnic Hungarian politician, Előd Kincses rose to become the chief secretary of the *World Federation of Hungarians* in Budapest (December 1991), but nine months later he was removed from this position. He returned to Romania after a six-year exile and tried to re-integrate himself into ethnic Hungarian politics in Romania. As an ex-leader of the Hungarian community and a renowned person in Transylvania, he became the chairman in the Maros county section of the *Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania* (UDMR) until 2000. He was removed from this position in 2000 when he arbitrarily changed the election list approved by the leadership of the party. After a severe legal-political battle within the party, he lost all of his re-gained political positions.[9] He attributes his defeat in UDMR to the failed democratization process of Romania after the revolution. To sum up, the documentary suggests that personal and social conflicts are tightly interwoven in Kincses's fate. In the conflict structure of the documentary, ethnic and national political conflicts form the widest circle, personal and political conflicts in the Hungarian ethnic minority constitutes the middle circle, and personal conflicts inside the family comprise the narrowest one. Kincses depicts her father's personality by showing all the circles of the conflicting forces.

All of these conflicts become condensed in the ethnic clashes in Târgu Mureş (*Marosvásárhely* in Hungarian language) in Romania in 1990, the so-called *Black March*. For a better understanding of the events of the *Black March*, I must briefly describe their historical antecedents. After World War I, the Treaty of Trianon (named after the small building in the Versailles palace complex where the Hungarian delegates signed the treaty) ordered the ceding of two thirds of the territory of the historical Hungarian kingdom. Millions of ethnic Hungarians found themselves outside the new borders of Hungary in newly established states. The biggest group of ethnic Hungarians outside Hungary has been living in Transylvania since 1920, when the region was attached to Romania. In 1940, the second Vienna Award re-assigned the territory of North-Transylvania to Hungary, but it was returned to Romania at the end of World War II. The oppression of Hungarian ethnic groups increased gradually during the nationalist-communist dictatorship of Nicolae Ceauşescu, who was Romania's dictator between 1965 and

[9] On Előd Kincses' biography see: *Romániai magyar irodalmi lexikon* [*Encyclopaedia of Hungarian Literature in Romania*], ed. D. Gy. Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület and Kriterion Könyvkiadó, Kolozsvár 2002, <<http://mek.oszk.hu/03600/03628/html/kl.ht>

m#KincsesEl%C5%91d>; F. Udvardy, *A romániai magyar kisebbség történeti kronológiája 1990–2006* [*Historical Chronology of Hungarian Ethnic Minority in Romania 1990–2006*] <<http://udvardy.adatbank.transindex.ro/index.php?action=ev&ev=1990>>.

1989. Béla K. Király wrote a report on the Hungarian ethnic minority's situation in 1988, in which he claimed: "What has been perpetrated in Romania – through increasingly overt methods since 1980 – is a kind of cultural genocide. The primary target of this campaign has been the more than two-million strong Hungarian ethnic community, the majority of whom live in Transylvania. They have been deprived of the right to use their own language to preserve their culture, and their historical traditions." [10]

After these antecedents, Hungarians took part actively and enthusiastically in the Romanian revolution in December 1989, and both nations seemed to feel a fraternity to each other. The victory of the revolution triggered a public struggle for equal rights for ethnic Hungarians in Romania. Hungarians started claiming their rights for their own cultural and educational institutions immediately because they had had bad experiences in terms of ethnic rights during the 70 years of Romanian authority, and they did not trust the promises of the Romanian politicians. Márton László and Csaba Zoltán Novák summarize the causes of the interethnic conflicts in their seminal book on the *Black March*.

The fight against Ceaușescu has united the Romanian and the Hungarian [...] However the feeling of common victory was overwritten in a short time by the problems of transitions. The problems of the changing of regime, the ousting of the old Party staff, the future and the fate of the old elite, of the militia (police), the efforts of the ethnic Hungarians to quickly establish schools with exclusive Hungarian curriculum; all these represented the major causes of this phenomenon [...] The central and local authorities of the FSN could not cope and could not solve all these problems. At the end of January and the beginning of February the city of Târgu Mureș was divided around two ethnic groups. [11]

László and Novák studied the events and the causes of the ethnic clashes in detail. They assert that after the first weeks of co-operations between the two ethnic groups, the new Romanian political leaders, some of them members of the old political elite, realised that they could increase their popularity by continuing the nationalistic propaganda against Hungarians that had been typical of the Ceaușescu regime. The Romanian press, which followed the new political trend, fuelled ethnic tension by distorting Hungarians' demands and by writing about separatism. Due to the misrepresentation of Hungarians' struggle for their rights and the missing democratic culture in the country, the ethnic Romanian majority was not able to understand and thus overestimated the threat Hungarians caused to the unity of the country. Ethnic tensions escalated in February and March 1990, and after some bloody incidents, brutal violence broke out between the two ethnic groups in

[10] Király, K. Béla, "The Hungarian Minority's Situation in Ceausescu's Romania", trans. C. Tennant, *Atlantic Studies of Society in Change*, no. 68, 1994, <<http://www.hungarianhistory.com/lib/humis/humisoo.htm>>.

[11] M. László, C.Z. Novák, *A szabadság terhe*, Marosvásárhely, 1990 március 16–21 [*Burden of Liberty*, Târgu Mureș, 16–21. March 1990], Dr. Bernárdy György Közművelődési Alapítvány – Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 2012, p. 285.

the Transylvanian city of Târgu Mureş. Human Rights Watch describes the events of the 19th and 20th of March in its report.

On March 19, the headquarters of the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) was attacked by a large group of ethnic Romanians. The police and army did not respond to the UDMR's calls for protection until several hours after the attack began. Many ethnic Hungarians trapped inside were seriously injured. On the following morning, some 15,000 ethnic Hungarians gathered in the town square to protest the previous day's events. Romanian peasants from villages outside Târgu Mureş arrived in the town centre long after the roads should have been closed, and joined the Romanians already in the square. Around 5:00 p.m., violence erupted as ethnic Romanians surged forward and attacked the Hungarians, breaking the single line of 50 police that the authorities had sent to divide the two groups. Although the police and army had been made aware of the potential for violence by both Hungarian and Romanian leaders, who had made numerous reports of the escalating tensions in the square, the authorities once again failed to respond in an adequate manner to protect the citizens of Tîrgu Mures.[12]

Six people died and thirty people were badly injured during the clashes. Fortunately, after a few days of unrest and some years of ethnic tensions, the relationship between Hungarians and Romanians settled in the country. The *Black March* was the first severe ethnic violence during the political transition in Eastern Europe.

In contrast with a six-part historical documentary, *The Black March of Marosvásárhely* (dir: Gyula Miholcsa, 2010) which provides a detailed historical account mainly through an omnipotent voice-over narration, *Balkan Champion* depicts the events of the 20th of March and their aftermath from a personal point of view. The viewer can have a more objective and extensive insight on these events from a six-part historical documentary, *The Black March of Marosvásárhely* (dir: Gyula Miholcsa, 2010) which, as a typical example of the expository documentary mode, provides a detailed historical account mainly through an omnipotent voice-over narration and archive video materials. However, as I strive to demonstrate in this paper, the first-person documentary has other advantages besides offering more subjective and emotionally intensive experience to the audience than an expository documentary can give. The filmmaker tells about her memories of the Ceauşescu regime, the revolution, and the *Black March* in a first-person voice-over narration. The filmmaker says in an easy tone that she intended to attend the demonstration taking place in the city centre on the 19th of March 1990, but had to take care of her younger sister, who had suffered a minor accident that day. Due to her absence from the street battles, she attempts to recapture the events by interviewing her mother about her personal experience on that day. The mother does not give a detailed account of the day, but the moments she emphasises and the humorous tone of her speech are revealing. The filmmaker asks

[12] <<http://www.hrw.org/reports/1990/WR90/HEL-SINKI.BOU-02.htm>>.

her father, as well, but he is very laconic about his memories of the 19th of March. The archive materials which depict her father's public appearances as the political leader of ethnic Hungarians in those days replace his missing testimony. As the quasi-objective interviews do not achieve their aim, the personal aspects and the social-psychological roots of the collective trauma are exposed by more active involvement on the part of the filmmaker.

To understand the significance of the documentary in revealing the suppressed past, I focus on the main characters and the way in which they recall or re-experience personal and collective traumas under the pressure of the filmmaker's inquiry. The protagonist, Előd Kincses, is a closed personality, so the documentary cannot reveal his personal experiences to the collective trauma of the *Black March*. Not even his daughter, the filmmaker, can elicit stronger emotions from

her father when she asks him about the ethnic conflicts. He neutrally and naturally talks about the fear that he felt when he became public enemy number one for the nationalist Romanians, was threatened by them, and decided to flee. His apparent indifference towards the traumatic past might point to an unconscious detachment from it, because this period ended with his public and moral defeat both as a political leader and a father. Kincses shows stronger positive and negative emotions only towards his ex-friends and ex-colleagues, ethnic Hungarian politicians, mainly György Frunda. These emotions reveal that Kincses cannot come to terms with the betrayal – or what he regards as a betrayal – of his friends, that is, their expelling him from the political community of Hungarians in Transylvania. The filmmaker concentrates on the reasons for and the consequences of this fall. The contrast is striking between the

past and the present. He is represented in the archive audio-visual materials shot in 1990 as a determined leader and a talented orator, who is not scared of expressing his opinion facing a furious mob. In his daughter's present shots, he appears to be a lonesome loser, who keeps expressing his political opinion and taking the challenge to struggle for election again and again, but does not seem to believe in his own victory. However, he always finds excuses for his failures. If somebody questions his opinion or behaviour in the present or in the past, he either does not respond to it or he gets offended. Előd Kincses always behaves self-contentedly, and he keeps shifting the responsibility for his personal and professional (as a politician) failure onto everybody else. He blames his Hungarian rivals for having worked for the Romanian



secret police as informers. He claims that they betrayed not only the cause of the Hungarian minority, but also the entire democratization process of Romania by making a pact with the ex-communists, who had managed to preserve their political and economic power. The damaged political transition in Romania may have been a traumatic experience for him, and the repetition of his behaviour is a trace of this. Kincses explains his personal failures and the inadequacies of the new societies and political system with a conspiracy theory. He tries to heal his trauma with a melodramatic narrative of victimhood. He regards himself as a victim, which is in line with the general attitude of Hungarian society, fuelled by right-wing politicians, such as Kincses himself. They see the nation as a victim of fatal historical events and a world-wide conspiracy. The filmmaker should confront him with his views, but Réka Kincses is blinded by her father's charisma at this point. She makes an obvious mistake as a documentary filmmaker when she does not question her father's conspiracy theory, but instead reinforces his assertions about Frunda's role as a secret police informer without any proof. This suggests that the family needs to find new common enemies to maintain its unity.

To understand Előd Kincses's offended behaviour, the filmmaker invites other people to talk about her father. His politician ex-friends share the opinion that Kincses is a stubborn character who is not able to make compromises. The filmmaker gives an example of this morally grounded stubbornness in the title of the documentary. Kincses became a Balkan champion, and not a European champion, as a runner because despite his injury he decided to compete in a race for moral reasons, and consequently suffered serious health problems. Kincses's wife adds to the general view, as her husband keeps repeating the same thoughts, while the "soul", that is, the emotional core of his speeches, has been lost, as if he did not believe in his political ideas anymore. She thinks that her husband finds happiness in martyrdom. His younger daughter agrees with her mother when she says to the filmmaker's provocative question that her father can feel pity only for himself. The advantage of the first-person documentary in understanding a person or a situation becomes apparent when the filmmaker herself arrives at a conclusion concerning her father's shortcomings. When she started shooting her documentary, she was convinced of her father's superiority, and interviews his political rivals to do justice for her father. Near the end of the film, however, she becomes entangled in an argument with her father when he reproaches her for not asking her interviewee certain particular questions. Réka Kincses starts complaining about her father's obsessions, his presumed superiority, and his lack of empathy. This way the filmmaker shows her protagonist's traits not only from other's



people point of view, but also through her own story and personal experiences. She provides an explanation for his failure by unconsciously or semi-consciously provoking him and eliciting the typical behaviour patterns that have led to his isolation in political circles. Watching the strongly emotional debate between father and daughter, the viewer not only imagines but also experiences the annoying stubbornness of Kincses, which provides an explanation for the father's failures.

During the quest for her father's personality Réka Kincses widened the scope of her inquiry, shedding light on personal and historical traumas that the entire family suffered. The key figure in this particular family drama is the filmmaker's mother. Mária Kincses-Ajtay has an open and impulsive character, and she readily reveals her emotions as the filmmaker talks to her. Réka Kincses starts by asking her mother neutral questions, but later she quietly comments on the peculiarities of her account on the past, and finally, toward the end of the film, directly and angrily confronts her mother. The mother expresses her fury against Romanians many times during the film. When she tells the story of the 20th of March 1990, she laughingly jokes about Romanians who were hiding under the beds in their hotel rooms, where enraged Hungarians found them and gave them a severe beating. The filmmaker asks her mother why she is laughing at such a tragic event, but she does not inquire into her motives at this point. Later in the film, the mother starts openly complaining about the Romanians, and the filmmaker gradually exposes her prejudices and the motives behind them. The mother generalises about the insults to her family and the Hungarian nation inflicted by Romanians in the past. She blames the Romanian political elite for deliberately ruining the culture of ethnic Hungarians and not substituting another culture for it. She assumes that Romanian culture is inferior to Hungarian culture, and, consequently, Romanians are inferior to Hungarians. The filmmaker juxtaposes her mother's opinion with comments by Dr. Ioan Sabău-Pop that Hungarian and Romanian cultures share much in common and that the corrupt politicians of the two nations understand each other splendidly. The subsequent conversation between the mother and the filmmaker is the key event in this documentary. This scene is a striking example of how an interactive technique can help a documentary filmmaker reveal unresolved traumas by arousing strong emotions in her characters. The filmmaker provokes her mother by saying that she cannot recognize and acknowledge Romanians' suffering caused by Hungarians in the past. The increasing tension between them induces the filmmaker to respond to



her mother's aggressive words with similar passionate sentences. She confronts her mother with contradictions in her views. This provocation makes her mother furious to the point where she reveals her hatred of Romanians. Réka Kincses obviously would not be able to carry out such a heated interview if she were not a member of the interviewed family. As a family member, however, she needs to normalize her relationship with her mother, so they have a more peaceful talk later that night. The last conversation between the filmmaker and her mother, which touches on the relationship between Hungarians and Romanians, cannot reassuringly settle the problem. According to Réka Kincses the only way to make peace between the two nations is to recognize and understand the wounds and sufferings of the other side. Her mother does not accept the filmmaker's reasonable proposal, and instead keeps asking stubbornly whether the Romanians can see the Hungarians' sufferings.

Through her mother's aggressive attitude towards Romanians, the filmmaker is able to expose vast suppressed negative energies that may have exploded in the ethnic clashes during *Black March*. The twentieth-century history of Hungary is often represented as a history of victimhood in the conservative interpretations that permeate the collective consciousness of the Hungarian nation. As Allen Meek writes:

In biopolitical terms, trauma functions as a shock to the body of the social collective: a shock which is able to be employed for strategic political goals. A traumatized community is a disoriented and passive community open to manipulation and therefore able to be directed into violent acts of retribution.[13]

The concept of the collective victimhood of Hungarians does not permit them to imagine the members of other nations as victims of oppressive and aggressive Hungarian rule. If the nation is apt to represent itself as a victim in every historical circumstance, then it cannot understand its history and its responsibility in historical tragedies. Hungarians understand their history as a fatal series of accidents, as a consequence of an original trauma. Péter György asserts that

Trianon is [...] an exceptional, unique, incomparable event in the Hungarian history, which changed the [...] framework of understanding both the past and the future [...] It is the opening of the short 20th century which was [...] traumatic, offended [...] and lacking any consensus from Hungarian point of view.[14]

He asserts that Trianon was a collective trauma because the framework of the collective self-understandings of the nation collapsed, and Hungarians have not been able to find adequate answers and attitudes to this traumatic experience since 1920. György urges the nation to come to terms with the Trianon trauma by intergenerational work on behalf of collective memory, which is the only path that can lead to mental resti-

[13] A. Meek, op. cit., p. 195.

[14] P. György, *Állatkert Kolozsváron. Képzelt Erdély. [Zoo in Cluj. Imagined Transylvania]*, Magvető, Budapest 2013, p. 128 [my own translation – L.S.].

tution. György points to the fatal mistake of the new constitution written by the present right-wing government, which treats the consequences of the Trianon treaty in an ahistorical and mythic way. He claims that the new constitution attempts to force the virtual restitution of the old Hungary and Hungarians outside and inside the Trianon borders by political and legal means, rather than through collective introspection and facing amnesia.^[15] Réka Kincses's confrontation with her own mother and father (who neutrally shares his wife's racist views about Romanians) signifies the great importance of intergenerational dialogue concerning trauma. The younger generations of ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania have much more experience with different cultures and nations, as exemplified by the filmmaker (living in Germany) herself. Their experiences outside the Hungarian community and their relatively peaceful co-existence with Romanians in Transylvania after the *Black March* must have attributed to ethnicity loosening its grip on their identity. Therefore, dialogue between the older generations (socialized in the hermetically closed world of Romanian communism, where they were deprived of ethnic rights) and younger generations can bring to the surface mistreatment suffered by the community during past traumatic events. An open dialogue could help them to treat collective trauma consciously, which provides a start for the healing process. First-person documentaries such as *Balkan Champion* can play a significant role in the initiation of such dialogues.

The most intimate circle of the conflict structure touches on the personal traumas that family members suffered when the family split. Réka Kincses keeps returning to a question she puts to her father: why did he leave his family behind in those violent days when he had a fear of

deadly threats? Kincses shifts the responsibility onto his wife, who decided not to follow her husband into exile. By focusing on the father's present attitude to this question, the filmmaker makes the viewer understand that he feels awkward about his past behaviour, but as usual, is unwilling to admit his faults. The confrontation with the mother proves that the father did not lie about the reasons for the family split. The mother defends her decision, citing professional and financial motives. She proudly tells how happy she was after her husband's departure, which implies marital conflicts were a reason for her decision to stay. The filmmaker's younger sister was the only one in the family who really suffered from the family split and the consequences of the ethnic clashes. She loved her father and felt lonely after his departure, whereas Réka Kincses left to study at the university in Cluj and the mother was busy making her



[15] Ibidem, p. 340.

career. In front of their parents, Imola Kincses tells her sister that she had a terrible fear of the nationalist Romanians, especially after she realised that her father had fled because of their threats. The documentary shows that she was the victim both of her parents' irresponsibility and the ethnic tensions. Her traumatic experience is revealed in an emotionally heated scene when Imola starts crying while, perhaps for the first time, she talks to her parents about the pain she has suffered. The filmmaker behaves as a mediator, confronting the father along with Imola, at which point Előd Kincses understands his responsibility. The father feels the urge to console her daughter in front of the camera. Here, the filmmaker as a mediator helping to heal this traumatic wound.

The film starts with a self-account in the style of a first-person documentary, but later it is the filmmaker who is reluctant to talk about her experiences following the *Black March*. She does not speak about her responses to the consequences of the events and her father's defection. Kincses does not recall her own memories of the splitting up of her family, nor her feelings when she, her mother and sister were left alone in a hostile environment in Romania. When her mother hints at Réka's beginning university studies at that time, we can only guess that her age and her situation were reasons for her leaving Târgu Mureş and what was left of her family. The viewer can assume that she was 18 years old at the time, and in the last year of secondary school; she must have stayed with her family in the city in the spring and summer of 1990 before starting her university studies in Cluj. Réka Kincses' negligence in revealing her own true personal experience concerning the *Black March* and its consequences on her family life raises questions about a filmmaker's responsibility in the case of first-person documentaries. There is a striking contrast between the content and tone of her short personal account and the deeper and longer analysis of her family members. She distances herself from the events, as if she did not have her own feelings or any responsibility towards her younger sister and her mother. Meanwhile she urges her family members to confess their feelings and reveal hidden facts, she repeatedly forces them to confront one another and the historic facts, and she passes judgements on her mother and father's behaviours and attitudes. Kincses took a controversial position, presumably unconsciously, during the filmmaking process because she fundamentally withdrew herself from her family's affairs, playing the role of an outsider, though she sometimes abandons this attitude and sharply criticises or shouts at her interviewees, that is, her parents, which would be unacceptable for an outsider. Yet if she dares to openly interfere with her interviewee's talk as an insider, causing the most intimate and dramatic scenes in *Balkan Champion*, then she should also take responsibility by confessing her own past and examining herself and her conscience in the mirror of the camera as did Doug Block in *51 Birch Street* (2005).

To sum up, *Balkan Champion* proves that personal and historical traumas can be effectively explored by means of the self-reflexive and

interactive filmmaking techniques of first-person documentaries, which can help the members of a community (family, nation, etc.) confront their past, revealing hidden memories and, in particular, expressing emotional associations with traumatic events. *Balkan Champion* is a unique work in terms of facing the long-lasting consequences of the collective trauma the Hungarian nation suffered as a result of Trianon. The intergenerational conversation provoked by the filmmaker can help the participants in the documentary and the audience achieve collective understanding. The first-person technique, however, cannot force the characters to change their attitude to history in short term, but it can contribute to the long-term improvement or healing of the collective psyche. The documentary points to the “eternal return” of suppressed trauma in the form of negative emotions towards another



ethnic group which erupt in ethnic clashes, such as the *Black March*. Although, in general, the filmmaker-participant can also serve to promote a more profound and more personal understanding of the traumatic events, in this particular case, Kincses refused to provide her own account of the climactic scenes and their aftermath. The shifting position between outside and inside the family, however, poses ethical dilemmas. If the filmmaker enters into the projected world in the documentary, she has to share the responsibility to confess along with other characters, who reveal – verbally and emotionally – their links to the traumatic past. *Balkan Champion* also exemplifies filmmakers' obligations to normalize their relationship to the community involved in their first-person documentary. Réka Kincses attempts to restore peace in her family after having sharp quarrels with her parents. She does not want to sacrifice her relationship

with her mother and father for the sake of a scandalous documentary. She edits some excerpts of a happy situation when the family members are dancing together in a garden and peaceful moments from the everyday life of her father (shopping, hiking, dancing, swimming) into a series of dramatic confrontations. These sequences show him as a contented person in his private life, while he keeps playing the victim in his public roles. The film climactically ends with an emotional photo that depicts father and daughter embracing each other lovingly. Réka Kincses closes her documentary by suggesting family reconciliation. Her exposing traumatic experiences but provoking reconciliation at the end of the documentary may exert a therapeutic influence on the characters, and hopefully, on the viewers, as well. It is not enough to tear wounds open; one also needs to tend to them and heal them.